

Child Support Report

Vol. 36 No. 10 October 2014

Florida 'parenting time' project connects family violence survivors to child support and more

By Tania Sanchez, Project Manager
State Attorney's Office Child Support
Enforcement Division
Miami-Dade, Florida



Safety and confidentiality for child support clients topped our priorities when we launched Miami-Dade's project in January to simplify mediation for court-approved parenting plans. Under the OCSE Parenting Time Opportunities for Children (PTOC) grant program, the project helps victims of family violence seek child support services and quickly connects them with certified domestic violence centers in Miami.

The project is a partnership among the Florida Child Support Division, the 11th Judicial Circuit Family Division, the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Miami-Dade County Community Action and Human Services Department Violence Prevention and Intervention, and Justice Strategy & Security, Inc., an independent evaluator.

Designing our preparedness plan

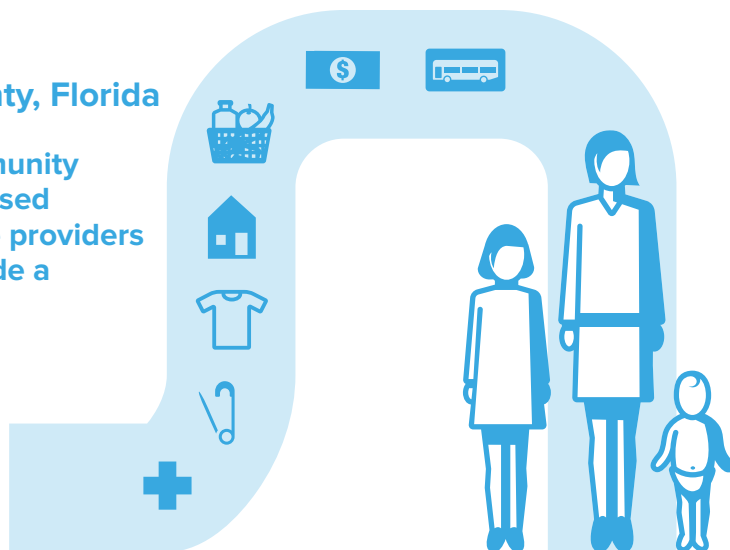
During project design, we consulted with an expert from the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence to develop a "family violence response and preparedness plan." The plan includes an evidence-based screening tool that helps identify families facing domestic violence and at the same time addresses the needs of the county's diverse population.

The screening helps project staff identify victims of violence in a safe and compassionate manner, considering local community issues such as immigration,

continued

Miami-Dade County, Florida

More than 30 community and government-based crime victim service providers coordinate to provide a "one-stop-shop"



Inside this issue

- 1 Florida 'parenting time' project connects family violence survivors to child support and more
- 2 HHS study applies behavioral economics in child support
- 3 Commissioner's Voice: Our focus on domestic violence survivors
- 4 Family violence resources for the child support community
- 4 Virginia reinvents outlook for dads who face barriers to paying child support
- 6 Connecticut employment pilot succeeds through collaboration with magistrate court
- 7 Child support a key component in Washington State's annual community-sponsored 'Institute'
- 8 Child Support Awareness Month



NEW LEGISLATION

Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183) contains child support provisions

Subscribe to the *Child Support Report*. Sign up at the bottom of the OCSE homepage



language barriers, abuse to pets, gun ownership, emotional abuse of the non-offending parent and children, and violence from third parties.

In Miami-Dade, we want to engage victims in a conversation that promotes confidentiality, compassion, information about available resources, and ultimately engage them in wrap-around safety services. We implemented this type of screening instead of a “yes” or “no” impersonal questionnaire so that victims obtain information about keeping themselves and their children safe.

Increase in cases and referrals

After training 149 child support employees and mediators on the dynamics of domestic violence and resources available in their community, child support staff began to see an increase in the number of cases in need of domestic violence services. Since then, the Miami-Dade program has provided on-site crisis intervention, safety planning, and information and referral to more than 85 families.

Since we implemented the PTOC project in January, the program has helped more than 85 custodial mothers and their children by connecting them with agencies that provided financial emergency assistance, diapers, baby formula, food, clothes, low-income housing, bus passes, relocation monies, and many other services.

We immediately connect victims with the certified domestic violence center called Advocates for Victims Program, which is a part of the Coordinated Victim Assistance Center – the county’s “one stop shop” to more than 30 community and government-based crime victim

service providers. Because of this program, we now refer child support clients facing family violence directly to this center where they can access many services.

These services include emergency shelter programs, transitional housing, domestic violence and sexual assault relocation assistance, victim compensation, group and individual counseling, GED classes, court orientation, parenting classes, emergency financial assistance, financial literacy workshops, food voucher assistance, education and training, vocational rehabilitation services, legal counseling, assistance with protective orders, dissolution of marriage, and rental-mortgage and utility assistance.

A mother’s gratitude

After getting help, a survivor of domestic violence and custodial mother with the Miami-Dade child support office wrote: “I want to thank you for your empathy, sensitivity, and your suggestions in regard to my situation with the father of my son. Your professionalism and human warmth has given me strength and tenacity to continue in my search for justice and emotional peace; thus rejoicing in the enormous gift of being alive and learning from the experience.”

That statement is just one of the many we get from child support clients who appreciate that we connect them to services and who found support through the PTOC project.

The services by the Miami-Dade PTOC program have become an integral part of the Miami-Dade State Attorney’s Office mission as we strive toward creating a safer place to live, work, and raise our families.

RESEARCH

HHS study applies behavioral economics in child support

A new report from the HHS Administration for Children and Families illustrates the positive effects that behavioral economics can have in child support. By using behavioral economics to modify the materials that staff members send to incarcerated noncustodial parents, the Texas Office of the Attorney General’s Child Support Division significantly increased the group’s request for order modifications.

OCSE awards grants

OCSE will explore behavioral economics with eight new grant awards for “Behavioral Interventions in Child Support Services” to California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Georgia, Ohio, Texas, Vermont, and Washington. OCSE also awarded Washington State a grant to evaluate the eight projects. Look for details on the projects in the *Child Support Report* early next year.





Our focus on domestic violence survivors

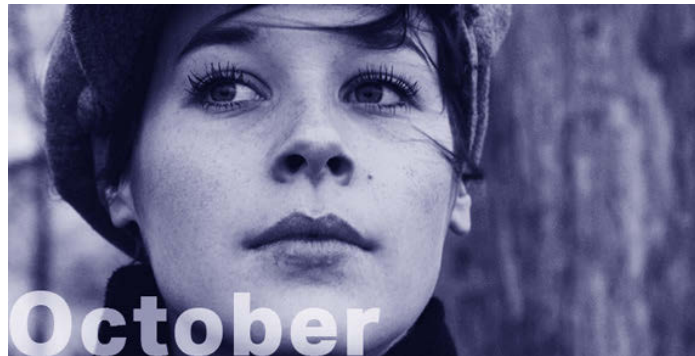
Domestic violence discussions were widespread on social media in September because of events in the news. #WhyIStayed and #WhyILeft were top trending Twitter topics as survivors of family

violence used the hashtags to tweet their stories. As a result, calls to the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) and renewed interest in employee training to address domestic violence increased dramatically.

Domestic violence has long been important to the child support community. Child support income is critical for most parents who are survivors of domestic violence, but child support establishment and enforcement can increase the risk of abuse. As child support professionals, we are responsible for ensuring that survivors of domestic violence receive child support safely and confidentially. While the topic for this blog is timely because October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, this is an every-month concern for child support agencies and other organizations. For example, the [Domestic Violence Awareness Project \(@NationalDVAM\)](#) tweets about conversations and resources continuously throughout the year.

Many state and tribal child support programs deliver specialized services to families impacted by domestic violence. Like OCSE, they collaborate with domestic violence organizations to develop policies and procedures that offer safe child support services.

In child support, we engage with both parents. That engagement must be designed to reduce, not increase, the risk of harm to family members. This is why we are reemphasizing our focus on cases involving domestic violence by offering more opportunities to address parenting time and domestic violence safeguards. Through our dual-parent engagement, we are also working to connect survivors to important services while helping



families obtain needed financial support. While automation of many case-processing activities is beneficial for program efficiency, it can pose risks and challenges to certain families. Order establishment and certain types of enforcement measures also may increase the risk. These potential dangers require informed and creative thinking about how to best serve our families safely. For example, see how Miami-Dade's parenting-time grantees help victims of family violence seek child support services and connect them with domestic violence centers in Miami. (See article on page 1.)

The child support program has made great strides in providing services to survivors of domestic violence, however, we know there is room to both increase and enhance safety. That's why we'll have new domestic violence materials for the child support community soon.

In the meantime, I encourage every child support agency to have a comprehensive family violence plan that includes the Family Violence Indicator policies as one important part of a broader framework for safe delivery of child support services.

Carefully and thoughtfully responding to domestic violence is not a new concern or issue. We know many of your agencies have developed appropriate and effective strategies and model programs. Several years ago, we highlighted some of them in this fact sheet, [Family Violence Collaboration](#). We look forward to hearing more about your work in this critical area.

Vicki Turetsky

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Grant opportunity to partner with SNAP

USDA issued its [Request for Applications](#) to state SNAP agencies to participate in the SNAP employment and training pilot. Up to \$200 million is available to test innovative approaches to helping SNAP participants find jobs and increase their earnings. This is an opportunity for state child support agencies to partner with SNAP agencies to better serve parents participating in both programs. Grant applications are due Nov. 24, 2014.

Child poverty down in married-couple families

A [Census release on income, poverty and health insurance coverage](#) cites the first annual decline in childhood poverty since 2000 – from 21.8% in 2012 to 19.9% in 2013. While reductions in poverty were significant for children in married-couple families and families with a male householder, the changes in poverty for children in families with a female householder were not statistically significant.

Family violence resources for the child support community



The OCSE website offers several [domestic violence resources on the Family Violence web page](#). These include:

- [Training tools](#), developed in collaboration with the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, can help child support offices identify and address customers' domestic violence issues and help families safely pursue child support. Child support managers may use these materials to conduct a no-cost training for their staff. These tools include a training presentation, trainer notes (with training tips and talking points), and a training guide.
- [Bench Card for the judiciary](#) is a handy one-pager that describes the relationship between child support and domestic violence.
- [Desk Card for caseworkers](#) is a two-page guide that explains how to recognize and work with victims of domestic violence.

- [Outreach Card](#) is a fillable brochure for child support agencies to present local contact information to domestic violence victims, also in [Spanish](#).
- [Fact sheet – Family Violence Collaboration](#) highlights several successful collaborations between child support programs and domestic violence organizations.
- [OCSE document \(PIQ 12-02\) on partnering](#) with other programs, including outreach, referral, and case management activities. This explains allowable federal funding for state agency collaboration activities.

Find a domestic violence organization near you

The Family Violence Prevention Services program, in the HHS Administration for Children and Families, funds state domestic violence coalitions. You can also find resources at the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women (www.vawnet.org).

PROMISING PRACTICES

Virginia reinvents outlook for dads who face barriers to paying child support

By Deidre Bailey and Joy Sullivan,
Prisoner Re-Entry Case Managers
Virginia Beach Division of
Child Support Enforcement

Positive and consistent emotional and financial support from both parents improves a child's well-being. However, some fathers face barriers: incarceration, unemployment, substance abuse issues, feelings of inadequacy, and custody or parenting issues.

To help these fathers, the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) collaborated with the Virginia Beach Department of Human Services and the Virginia Beach and Norfolk District Offices of the state DCSE to coordinate referrals from the state's Intensive Case



Virginia's Club Reinvent sessions offer professional guidance and peer support

Management project. In May 2013, these partners began Club Reinvent to help fathers find and keep employment and support their children.

Craig M. Burshem, DCSE Deputy Commissioner and Director, says Club Reinvent is "a great example of collaboration between child support and a local department of social services to provide holistic services to help families that we both serve become more self-sufficient."

continued

“The responsibility of leadership in this group is to communicate to the fathers their self-worth and potential so clearly they come to see it in themselves.”



Weekly sessions

Club Reinvent participants meet weekly with three facilitators: Brian Hawkins, family services coordinator for the Virginia Beach Department of Human Services, and DCSE family engagement program case managers Deidre Bailey and Joy Sullivan (authors of this article).

The two-hour sessions offer consistent peer support and professional guidance that the participants need to stay focused on employment and personal goals. Over 100 participants have graduated by obtaining employment. Hawkins says, “The responsibility of leadership in this group is to communicate to the fathers their self-worth and potential so clearly they come to see it in themselves.”

Club Reinvent offers support for fathers to deal with the trauma, abuse, family dysfunction, violence, and resentment over the lack of their own fathers in their lives – possibly core reasons for decisions that made criminal activity appear as an acceptable option. The participants are challenged to take stock of the life experiences that have propelled them into criminal activity, take responsibility for their behavior, change life-long patterns of violence and addiction, and build productive lives.

Job readiness training

One of the main components of the program is job readiness skill training using a holistic approach. It includes job-search strategies using both online and manual applications; selecting attire for the interview; eye contact skills; and responses to questions. Each participant is prepared for an on-the-spot job interview and to speak instantly and concisely about their employment desires and skills. Weekly drills on introducing themselves to others and expressing their qualifications promotes their ease during a personal interview.

While finding employment is a primary goal, training to learn how to maintain employment is also critical. Often, personal issues result in the loss of a needed job. To help deal with these problems, Club Reinvent also provides sessions on co-parenting skills, anger management, and financial planning.

On a recent visit to a Club Reinvent meeting, Rose Bynum, a program specialist in the federal OCSE office for region III (which includes Virginia), observed that each father introduced himself exuding confidence. “They engaged in the meeting topics and invited us into the conversation. They shared their vulnerability with us, and we shared with them,” says Bynum.

Peer support

The Virginia Beach and Norfolk child support staffs attend meetings to suggest employment opportunities and collect payments on the child support orders. While the economy and other barriers may affect the fathers’ ability to meet the monthly support obligation, a child support payment is a requirement to stay in the group.

If a father does not have the means to pay towards his obligation, one or more of the men will assist him with the money they can afford, allowing the father to make a payment on the child support. There is peer accountability and peer support.

Fathers graduate from the program when they are employed. Many visit as alumni, and previous participants have come back with job opportunities for others in the group. This is a wonderful testament to the camaraderie established in the group, the trust gained from exposing their personal stories in the weekly sessions, and the empathy each man feels for their shared situations.

Success is measured not only in job success but with personal success in changes made in their lives and those of their children.

Connecticut employment pilot succeeds through collaboration with magistrate court



**By Dalia Panke, Deputy Director
Cristina Johnson, Court Planner II
Connecticut Judicial Branch-Court Operations
Support Enforcement Services Unit**

The sting of the Great Recession left an indelible mark on many obligors in Connecticut. Due to personal and economic barriers, including unemployment and underemployment, numerous noncustodial parents unable to meet their child support obligations also faced contempt findings.

New state legislation in 2011 gave the Connecticut Judicial Branch and the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) an opportunity to start an employment pilot program for child support obligors who had cases pending in the Family Support Magistrate Division of Superior Court.

The pilot helped parents by using a holistic approach, connecting them to community-based employment readiness programs through two fatherhood initiatives in high-need areas of the state. “This pilot reinforced that giving parents ready access to employment services benefits families by producing more consistent and reliable child support for families,” says Support Enforcement Services Director Charisse Hutton.

Three pilot sites

The pilot sites were located in the three poorest cities in Connecticut (Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven) with poverty and unemployment rates substantially above the rest of the state. While the state’s overall unemployment rate at the time was 8.5 percent, these three cities experienced significant unemployment rates ranging from 13 percent to almost 17 percent.

The sites offered an array of services that address economic stability, parenting, and employment and vocational support services to promote job readiness skills. These services could increase parents’ likelihood of obtaining full-time employment, and lead to increasing the amounts and frequency of their payments. Employment could also prevent incarceration for being in contempt of child support orders.

Service providers at the court

Contracted service providers appeared at the court to conduct intake assessments with potential pilot participants on the contempt docket. The service providers also appeared on continuance dates. They brought individualized service plans for each participant, and reported on participants’ program compliance to the court. The program ran from January 2012 thru December 2012.

Positive results all around

The sites served 180 noncustodial parents, 60 at each. In all three cities, the pilot produced significant increases in the current support collection rate and frequency of payments. Most notable was a 79 percent increase in child support collected six months after referral to the program. The average number of payments increased 125 percent.

The upsurge in the number of payments received post referral meant positive results for custodial parents and their children by making child support a consistent and reliable source of income. The dollar amount per payment increased by only 1 percent, but payments became more consistent over time – despite the number of barriers to employment.

Innovation, cooperation

A magistrate’s ability to refer an obligor for services that address barriers and increase employability is an innovative and promising practice and extremely helpful to the court. Also key for the pilot was the presence of community partners at court hearings to offer progress and compliance reports for the obligors. Instituting a process before incarceration for noncompliance with support orders seems a necessary step within the range of graduated sanctions.

The outcomes from this pilot were a direct result of collaboration between all aspects of the magistrate court – including the leadership of the Chief Family Support Magistrate during the pilot’s design phase. The local magistrates were vital in developing court protocol for use during pilot implementation. The Judicial Branch-Support Enforcement Services Unit was instrumental in guiding the pilot’s format and provided the scope of referrals to the program.

It was this spirit of cooperation and dedication of all agencies that led to the pilot’s success. The experience formulated the infrastructure, court protocol, and community services needed for success. Future expansion could provide significant benefits for many custodial parents and their children as well as those individuals striving for opportunities that increase their positive financial and emotional involvement.

For more information or a copy of the program report, please contact dalia.panke@jud.ct.gov.

Child support a key component in Washington State's annual community-sponsored 'Institute'

By Nancy Mathieson, Child Support Program Specialist
OCSE Region X

Summer is over, but testimonials by alums from South Seattle College's reentry program will long inspire attendees from the 2014 Summer Institute.

The Summer Institute is an annual conference sponsored by Washington's Community Partnership for Transition Services (CPTS). This year, CPTS groups in several counties – King, Pierce, and Snohomish – collaborated with South Seattle College to refine best practices and foster partnerships. Led by South Seattle's Joe Garcia, the collaboration convened reentry service providers, the U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services, Department of Corrections, Bureau of Prisons, Child Support and Prosecuting Attorney staff, educators, and faith-based and community organizations.

Although CPTS has helped people in transition for more than 15 years, the Summer Institute began to include child support as a key component only a few years ago. Many organizations across the state offered services that address community safety, recidivism, and the costs impacting the justice system, as well as transition services for men and women returning home from incarceration or on supervision in the community. However, with limited resources, all of these organizations have struggled to help individuals become productive members in the community.

Changing views, connecting clients

Realizing that the child support program shares the organizations' goals – to help eliminate the barriers to sustainable employment and help parents support their families and pay child support – the community partners changed how they view the program.

Service providers who work with reentering citizens tell their clients that "the child support program got a makeover"; it strives to help parents pay support and stay involved with their family. Now, the service providers help their clients contact the child support agency to make arrangements to keep them employed and help them with child support order modification and potential debt forgiveness.

Especially involved at this Summer Institute were Washington Division of Child Support Director Wally McClure and his division leadership. Many division staff attendees, after hearing remarks from Commissioner Turetsky and alums of the South Seattle Reentry program, were inspired to bring the messages back to their colleagues. These messages, they believed, could help their colleagues see the value in giving reentering parents another chance.

This year, the Summer Institute added two tribal workshops. One focused on the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribal Reentry Program. The other, a multi-group workshop, spotlighted the Muckleshoot Tribe's Father's Matter Group Model Program, the South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency, and the Seattle Indian Health Board – and how each program supports native culture and tribal services for the success of native families.

For more information about next year's Summer Institute or a copy of the workshops and speakers from this year's event, contact the author at nancy.mathieson@acf.hhs.gov or 206-615-3768.



Scenes from Washington's Summer Institute show Commissioner Turetsky (far left at the podium), who inspired state child support staff to bring messages back to their colleagues.

Child Support Awareness Month

Many states and tribes officially proclaim August as Child Support Awareness Month. The next three pages offer a snapshot of some of the recent activities across the country.

Arizona family fun –

Arizona offered a Family Connection Fun Day (*right*) partnering with the Salvation Army Kroc Center's annual Back-to-School Bash. The event included games, entertainment, a backpack giveaway, and 52 service organizations offering useful information.



California publicity blitz – Awareness events in Madera (*below left*), Monterey (*below center*), and San Joaquin counties reached countless families in California. A Yolo County television program aired an [interview with the county child support director](#), and the state agency [produced PSAs](#) (*screenshot at right below*) and other outreach material and events.



Cherokee Nation Hula Day –

The Cherokee Nation child support office presented a “Hula on Down” day with a limbo contest, hula hoop activities, and the proclamation signing (*right*). Eight other Cherokee Nation service programs attended to offer information to families.



Spreading the word about child support services ...

Fort Belknap Indian Community Open House –

The Fort Belknap child support program sponsored an open house with about 70 visitors at the office. Staff (*right*) distributed information, answered questions, and helped clients complete applications.

Guam media tour – The Guam child support division kicked off its month-long carnivals and other activities with the proclamation signing at the Governor's office, followed by a media tour featuring Guam and division officials. The division also hosted an employer symposium for government agencies and the corporate community. (*Below left and right*)



Maryland state back-pack drive – The Maryland state agency sponsored a backpack drive (*below*) for the Baltimore Outreach Center, a shelter for women, most of whom have children. Agency staff donated 68 backpacks and school supplies – the 30 children in the center all had a backpack for their first day of school. This effort will also benefit children who come into the shelter throughout the year. [See more pictures on the agency's Flickr page.](#)



Partnering, posing, and lighting the way for child support awareness ...

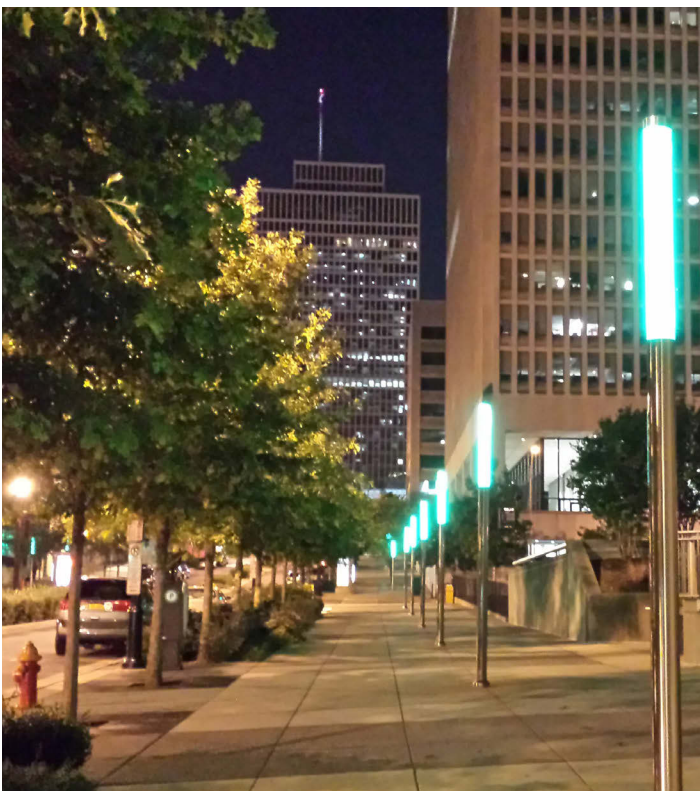
Maryland county volunteers – Charles County child support staff members volunteered at the Hooks & Hangers Quality Resale Store in La Plata, MD (right). The store is dedicated to building support for individuals with intellectual disabilities within our community.



Ohio Facebook campaign – Posing in green attire, Ohio Child Support Enforcement Directors' Association staff (right) displayed its signature awareness month photo, as well as more photos and illustrations from across the state, on its Facebook page.



Tennessee green lights – Tennessee chose green as its official color for child support awareness. The state agency worked with the Nashville Public Works office to place green covers on the light poles along Deaderick Street in downtown Nashville (below) .



Child Support Report

Child Support Report is published monthly by the Office of Child Support Enforcement. We welcome articles and high-quality digital photos to consider for publication. We reserve the right to edit for style, content and length, or not accept an article. OCSE does not endorse the practices or individuals in this newsletter. You may reprint an article in its entirety (or contact the author or editor for permission to excerpt); please identify Child Support Report as the source.

Mark Greenberg
Acting Assistant Secretary for Children and Families

Vicki Turetsky
Commissioner, OCSE

Gabrielle Pagin
Director, Division of Customer
Communications

Elaine Blackman
Editor
elaine.blackman@acf.hhs.gov

